

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

2017 SERGEI MAGNITSKY SANCTIONS LIST

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I wish to take this time to talk about two matters of human rights, which I know the Presiding Officer has been very much engaged with as an active member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I want to share this information with our colleagues.

This month marks the fifth anniversary of the 2012 Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law and Accountability Act. Today, with the publication of five new sanctions designations, the citizens of the Russian Federation—many of whom strive for a future governed by the rule of law—can claim a small victory over oppression. I hope that today's news provides a semblance of justice for the family of Sergei Magnitsky and those who continue to fight against corruption and human rights abuses across the country.

The Magnitsky list now includes 49 names—an important testament to the central importance that accountability and human rights should play in U.S. foreign policy.

I think the Members of this body are familiar with the circumstances surrounding Sergei Magnitsky's death. He was a young lawyer in Russia representing a company. He discovered corruption, and he did what any lawyer should do. He reported it to the authorities. As a result, he was arrested. He was tortured, denied medical care, and died in prison.

As a result of that, legislation was introduced. I was proud to sponsor it with my good friend Senator MCCAIN. It was enacted into law, as I said, 5 years ago. It holds those who perpetrate these violations of human rights accountable by denying them the right to visit our country—visa applications—or to use our banking systems.

The five additions to this list include Andrei Pavlov, Yulia Mayorova, and Alexei Sheshenia for their roles in the Magnitsky case and Ramzan Kadyrov and Ayub Kataev for gross violations of human rights. I appreciate the work of career officials at the Treasury and State Departments for their work in investigating and designating these important cases.

Andrei Pavlov is a Russian lawyer who played a central role orchestrating the false claims used in the \$230 million tax fraud that Sergei Magnitsky uncovered. His addition to the Magnitsky list is long overdue, as he played an essential role in the plot.

Yulia Mayorova is the former wife of Pavlov and a Russian lawyer. She also reportedly played a role in helping to facilitate the fraud uncovered by Sergei Magnitsky.

Alexei Sheshenia also reportedly played key roles in both the 2006 theft of the \$107 million in taxes paid by RenGaz and in the 2007 theft of the \$230 million of taxes paid by Hermitage. I understand that in both tax thefts, shell companies beneficially owned by Alexei Sheshenia used forged backdated contracts to obtain judgments against companies that paid a significant amount of taxes.

Ramzan Kadyrov is a renowned human rights abuser who has brutally run the Republic of Chechnya for more than 10 years. Under his rule, human rights offenders have been murdered, and gay men have disappeared. He has destroyed any semblance of the rule of law in the Republic. Over the course of his time in power, there have been credible allegations of his directing assassinations deployed across Russia and Europe. Human rights groups have documented many cases of torture and extrajudicial killings by forces under his control.

Ayub Kataev is a prison warden and head of the branch of the Chechen internal affairs ministry. Earlier this year, Chechen authorities reportedly set up concentration camps for gay men under his control. He certainly belongs on this list.

Since 2012, Senator MCCAIN and I have conducted rigorous oversight to ensure robust implementation of the Magnitsky law. In 2016, we wrote to the State Department with certain suggestions for inclusions on the list relevant to the death of Sergei Magnitsky. We also expressed concerns that the allegations of torture in Chechnya against gay men and other human rights violations in the North Caucasus should be investigated. I am pleased they took action that was responsive to both of our inquiries.

I want my colleagues to know that I do believe this administration has conducted the review on the Magnitsky list the way it should have been—keeping in close contact with Members of the Senate. I think the result speaks to the quality of work that was done in this year's list.

America's values are our interests. As a country, we must remain steadfastly committed to the principles embedded in the Magnitsky law—accountability, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. The American people expect U.S. policymakers to advance these principles in all aspects of our diplomatic relations. I welcome today's announcement and also expect the first publication of the "Global Magnitsky" sanctions designations this week.

As the Presiding Officer is well aware, we have recently passed the "Global Magnitsky" law that applies similar standards for human rights violations globally. That list should be made available, we hope, sometime this week.

VENEZUELA HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, a second subject that I wish to talk about today on human rights deals with the collapse in Venezuela. I come to the floor to speak about Venezuela's growing humanitarian tragedy and accelerating economic collapse.

Late last June, here on the Senate floor, I described Venezuela as a nearly failed State, where authoritarian leaders profit from links to corruption and drug trafficking, while the Venezuelan people are subject to precarious humanitarian conditions and human rights abuses. Disturbingly, the situation has only deteriorated since the time I was last on the floor talking about the circumstances.

With Venezuela's humanitarian crisis growing daily, conditions facing Venezuelan children are particularly dire. This week, the New York Times published a heartbreaking investigation of how Venezuelan children dying of hunger. It states:

Parents go days without eating, shriveling to the weight of children themselves. Women line up at sterilization clinics to avoid having children they cannot feed. Boys leave home to join street gangs that scavenge for scraps. . . . Crowds of adults storm dumpsters after restaurants close. Babies die because it is hard to find or afford infant formula, even in emergency rooms.

That is in our hemisphere in Venezuela.

The Catholic relief organization Caritas has determined that over 50 percent of the children are suffering from nutritional deficiencies. They project that 280,000 Venezuelan children could eventually die of hunger without an urgently needed humanitarian response.

As the Venezuelans increasingly suffer the ravages of hunger, the country's hospital system is collapsing. Essential medicines are in short supply, and more than half of the Nation's operating facilities no longer function or have sufficient supplies. Disturbingly, international relief organizations have found that over 60 percent of the Venezuelan hospitals don't even have potable water.

Amid these crisis conditions, Venezuelan President Maduro repeatedly denies the existence of this country's humanitarian crisis. He has even taken to the unprecedented step of setting up a party-controlled food distribution system referred to as CLAPS, and his government now uses food as a tool of political patronage.

The result is that the United States and our partners in the hemisphere now confront the situation where the Maduro regime would rather see its people go hungry than accept the foreign assistance the Venezuelans desperately need. This man-made tragedy is absolutely unacceptable.

Today I have written to Ambassador Nikki Haley, our Ambassador to the United Nations, to urge her to call an emergency special session of the U.N. Security Council to evaluate which United Nations mechanisms, including U.N. Security Council resolutions, should be pursued to alleviate the humanitarian suffering inside Venezuela.

As humanitarian concerns mount, human rights abuses of Venezuela are rampant. Last month, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights told the U.N. Security Council that this year Venezuelan security forces “systematically resorted to the arbitrary detention of more than 5,000 protestors.”

A more recent report by Human Rights Watch and Foro Penal, a Venezuelan nongovernmental organization, documents how Venezuelan security forces have subjected political opponents to “torture involving electric shock and asphyxiation.”

In response, Luis Almagro, the Secretary General of the OAS, has convened a series of hearings to receive testimony to ascertain whether members of the Venezuelan Government have committed crimes against humanity that should be referred to the International Criminal Court for prosecution. These efforts deserve our attention and our support.

Against this alarming backdrop, we require no explanation for why the United States has received more asylum requests from Venezuela than from any other nationality for 2 years straight.

These challenges will only grow as Venezuela’s economy continues to collapse. The country is in a selective default on its bonds. Hyperinflation and rapid currency devaluation are ravaging family incomes. This week, the country’s parallel exchange rate reached 12,000 times the official rate, meaning that the average Venezuelan now earns less than \$10 a month.

The reasons for this collapse are simple. Venezuela’s economy is plagued by endemic corruption and gross mismanagement. As this calamity grows, Senators need to be aware that Venezuela will eventually need a major IMF program that may well surpass the \$17 billion intervention that Ukraine required in 2014. The international community will have to respond, which will also include, of course, the United States.

We also need to recognize that Russia and China are now major stakeholders in Venezuela, in our hemisphere, and will be at the table as the international community copes with the pending collapse.

Russia, in particular, is playing geopolitics with the situation—refinancing Venezuela’s debt, offering loans in return for financial stakes in U.S.-based CITGO, securing stakes in Venezuela’s oil industry, and expanding its influence in our hemisphere.

In response to these growing challenges, the Trump administration has

applied greater pressure by imposing targeted sanctions against a number of individuals, including President Maduro. With this designation, President Maduro has joined the list of notorious heads of state on U.S. sanction list, including the likes of North Korea’s Kim Jong Un, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Zimbabwe’s former President Robert Mugabe, and Panama’s former President Manuel Noriega.

President Trump has also imposed financial sanctions blocking the issuance of new bonds to fund the Maduro regime’s ongoing repressive and economic mismanagement. The bond market has been one of the last lifelines for the Maduro government. Investors are right to lose trust in Venezuela’s ability to pay its debt.

We must recognize, however, that sanctions alone will not resolve the challenges the people of Venezuela are facing. We need a comprehensive strategy that utilizes all elements of U.S. diplomacy. We must provide critical foreign assistance to help mitigate the humanitarian crisis and bolster essential support for human rights and democratic civil society.

In May I introduced S. 1018, a bipartisan bill that lays out a comprehensive strategy for U.S. policy. My bill includes humanitarian assistance and funding to protect and promote human rights and democracy. It also includes a more aggressive approach to tackling the endemic corruption.

Earlier this month, the House of Representatives approved its version of this bill. It is time for the Senate to act. While I see an opportunity for bipartisanship in the Senate on U.S. policy toward Venezuela, I must say that I was alarmed by President Trump’s statement in August about a potential military option. Such cavalier comments are not helpful and, once again, call into question whether he has the temperament and judgment for dealing with serious national security challenges.

We must rise to the challenge of Venezuela as a great nation, bringing our full diplomatic resources and skills to bear and avoiding stooping to mere saber rattling.

I urge our colleagues to take on this challenge, to help the people of Venezuela, who are suffering from this humanitarian crisis, and to allow America’s entire toolkit to be used to help resolve this problem in our hemisphere.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise today concerned about the threats to

the special counsel’s critical investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Over the last several weeks, a growing chorus of irresponsible and reckless voices have called for President Trump to shut down Special Counsel Mueller’s investigation. At first, these calls came from the fringes of our political discourse—those who refuse to put our country and our security before base political instincts.

Earlier this year, many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle were right to push back on these misdirected calls and urge that the special counsel be allowed to do his job without interference. However, in recent weeks, those voices seem to be growing in stridency and in volume. Just this weekend, one major news organization suggested that Special Counsel Mueller could be involved in a coup against the President. One senior adviser at the White House has now outrageously alleged that “the fix was in against Donald Trump from the beginning.” Those statements are reckless. They are inappropriate, and they are extremely worrying. They are also at odds with the President’s own lawyers who have pledged to cooperate with the special counsel.

Beyond being irresponsible, the seemingly coordinated nature of these claims should alarm us all—particularly since, in recent days, these baseless accusations have been repeated by several Members of the House of Representatives.

I believe it is up to every Member of this institution, Republican or Democratic, to make a clear and unambiguous statement that any attempt by this President to remove Special Counsel Mueller from his position or to pardon key witnesses in any effort to shield them from accountability or shut down the investigation would be a gross abuse of power and a flagrant violation of executive branch responsibilities and authorities. These truly are red lines, and we simply cannot allow them to be crossed.

Let’s take a moment to remember why Special Counsel Mueller was appointed in the first place and why it remains so critical that he be permitted to finish his job without obstruction.

Recall, last spring, when we were all reeling from a series of confounding actions by this President, beginning with the firing of FBI Director Jim Comey on May 9. Mr. Comey was fired just 2 months after publicly revealing the FBI’s ongoing investigation of the Trump campaign and—as we would find out later—after several attempts by this President to improperly influence Director Comey.

Try to put yourself back into those dangerous days. Director Comey’s dismissal was met with confusion and widespread condemnation. We needed a stabilizing action from our Nation’s law enforcement leadership. We needed some certainty that the facts would be found and brought to light, regardless of what they were.